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Waiting in Organizations

Version accepted for publication by Time and Society

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WAITING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Key words: waiting; temporal orientation; temporality; power; delay

ABSTRACT

Waiting is a pervasive feature of organizational life and, as such, is likely to be important for a range of individual and organizational outcomes. Although extant research has shed light on the waiting experiences of diverse groups such as those suffering from illness, waiting in detention centres or queuing, there have been no previous attempts to theorise waiting specifically from the perspective of the employee. To address this gap, we draw on theories of temporality and waiting in fields such as consumer behaviour as well as the wider social sciences to develop the notion of ‘situated waiting’ which uncovers the complexity of the lived experience of waiting from the perspective of the employee. This experience is associated with factors at the level of the individual, the wait itself, and the broader waiting context. We outline the implications for future research on this hitherto hidden domain of the employee experience.

In Samuel Beckett's (1956) well-known play, *Waiting for Godot*, two characters, Estragon and Vladimir, await the arrival of the eponymous hero. They find ways to occupy their time and to distract themselves, including sleeping, eating and arguing, and suffer the interruptions of various passers-by, but find it hard to relieve the boredom of the seemingly endless, and ultimately pointless, wait (Schweizer, 2008).

Waiting is an existential feature of life and a pervasive characteristic of work (Jeffrey, 2008). Like Vladimir and Estragon, we are all compelled to wait (O'Brien, 1995). Academics wait to hear from journal editors concerning the outcome of their submissions, they wait for colleagues to respond to emails and requests for information, they wait outside the offices of senior members of staff, they wait for meetings to start, they wait to hear the outcome of a tenure application, for their computer to download updates, for new ideas to emerge, they wait in line for a cup of coffee. They wait anxiously, impatiently, diligently, with hope, resignation, boredom or fear. They wait alone, sometimes in the company of others, sometimes in competition with them. They wait for extended periods of time, chronic waiting (Jeffrey, 2008), or for moments, 'micro-waiting' (Gasparini, 1995: 42). They are made to wait by the actions of other people inside and outside their organization and, in turn, cause others to wait in a never-ending cycle of waiting and delay. That waiting features so prominently in late modern life has been attributed to the increased bureaucratisation of the 20th century and the consequent proliferation of settings where waiting becomes inevitable (Jeffrey, 2008).

Although it is impossible to avoid waiting at work - as O'Brien (1995: 177) writes, 'everyone I know is waiting' - and employees are likely to experience multiple types of waiting at any given time - it is puzzling to note that the extant literature is virtually silent on waiting from the perspective of the employee. Perhaps one of the reasons why waiting has been neglected is because the slowing down of time that is implicit in the concept of waiting runs counter to prevailing notions of the acceleration of time in late modernity (Agypt and Rubin, 2011;

Bissell, 2009; Moran, 2015; Rosa, 2013). Some have argued that we are witnessing the disintegration of past, present and future in the face of communication technologies that transcend space, facilitating the acceleration of ‘real time’ (Keightley, 2013: 118) thereby creating ‘timeless time’ (Castells, 2000: 13-14). We are supposedly moving beyond a culture of speed to one of immediacy (Keightley, 2013; Tomlinson, 2007). Waiting, conversely, is associated with ‘drag’ (Wang, 2008), slowness and delay, as well as with lost opportunities (Schwartz, 1975) and lack of temporal control (Minnegal, 2009), factors that sit ill with current emphasis on speed and hurry (Bissell, 2009).

Research in related areas of scholarly interest such as customer queuing (e.g. Lee, Chen and Hess, 2015; Liang, 2017), operations management (e.g. Schwartz, 1975) sociology (e.g. Auyero, 2011; Schwartz, 1975), health care (e.g. Klingemann et al., 2015; Waiting Times, 2018), illness (e.g. Ferrie and Wiseman, 2016) and migration studies (e.g. Rotter, 2016; Turnbull, 2016) has, nevertheless, revealed the importance and prevalence of waiting both as an organizational process and as an individual experience. Waiting is sometimes regarded as undesirable, as a waste of time, and as something that needs to be eliminated in the name of efficiency and effectiveness (Liang, 2017; Rotter, 2016; Schwartz, 1975). It is also from the individual’s perspective an interstitial period associated with powerlessness (Auyero, 2011; Khosravi, 2014) and with lost opportunity (Turnbull, 2016). Conversely, it may be filled with anticipation (Ferrie and Wiseman, 2016; Rotter, 2016), activity (Gustafson, 2012), opportunity (Sull, 2005), or rest (Gasparini, 1995). Waiting may equally be a necessary component of the working day, since working under constant pressure can be associated with work intensification and ill-health (Felstead et al., 2016).

A focus on waiting can be linked to a growing interest in time and temporality in organizational life more generally (Grondin, 2010; Labianca et al., 2005; Mohammed and Nadkarni, 2011; Pedersen, 2009). For instance, research has explored such topics as the temporal experience

of change (Huy, 2001; Lord et al., 2015; Smollan et al., 2010), time pacing and creativity (Labianca et al., 2005; Van Eerde, 2016), time management (Grondin, 2010; Sabelis, 2001; Yakura, 2002), temporal orientations at the level of the individual and the team (Blount and Janicik, 2001; Mohammed and Nadkarni, 2011; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015), justice perceptions over time (Cojuharenco et al., 2011; Fortin et al., 2016), and temporal leadership (Maruping et al., 2015). These studies shed valuable light on how individuals experience time in relation to work, and how time can be appropriated as a management tool, but they only engage at a very superficial level, if at all, with the day-to-day lived experience of employee waiting. Yet, for the employee, waiting of various types is likely to be a regular feature of the working day. As such, it is important to know more about how waiting is experienced, what waiting means to the individual, and how waiting may be salient in the context of wider work attitudes and experiences.

To address this gap, we focus on the ‘qualities and textures of waiting’ (Elliot, 2016: 103), with the aim of establishing new theoretical insights into waiting in organizations in order to pave the way for empirical research on this neglected topic. There are two contributions. First, by linking the wider social science literature on waiting with the literature on organizational temporality, waiting in organizations is problematised as a field of inquiry in its own right. Through uncovering the previously hidden and tacit ways in which waiting can be experienced and construed in an organizational setting, waiting emerges as a significant organizational process that warrants further study due to its potential relevance for a range of individual outcomes.

Second, we reveal waiting to be a multi-layered, textured experience that incorporates factors at the level of the individual, the wait itself, and the wider waiting context. We argue that these features interact, potentially giving rise to a range of positive or negative appraisals of the

waiting situation, leading to associated attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. These elements constitute the core components of a ‘situated waiting’ theory.

The article proceeds as follows. First, waiting is located within the wider body of work on temporality. The literature on waiting in related fields of inquiry such as social science and consumer behaviour is reviewed in order to extrapolate to the context of waiting in organizations. Next, the constituent elements of situated waiting are presented. Finally, we outline potential directions for future research.

Waiting and Temporality

Recent years have witnessed an increased focus on the importance of temporality for advancing scholarship in the management field and, within this context, the centrality of time to an understanding of the human experience of working has often been noted (Cunliffe et al., 2004; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). For example, Ancona et al. (2001: 660) argue that a ‘temporal lens’ provides ‘a powerful way to view organizational phenomena’. Time can thus be regarded as a meta-dimension of management (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015).

Within the temporality literature, the predominant Western capitalist mode of thinking is that time is objective, linear, quantitative and measurable, often referred to as ‘*clock time*’ (Crossan et al., 2005; Ramo, 2004). Clock time is abstracted from natural or seasonal cycles (Fitzpatrick, 2004). According to this view, time is viewed as flowing unproblematically forwards, and is separable from the events that take place within it and the meanings attributed to it (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Lord et al., 2015). Time is therefore a commodity that requires management and control, in order to optimise its use as a finite resource within the production process (Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). Hence, there is a focus on such management prerogatives as time management, timekeeping and the scheduling of work (Holmquist, 2013; Labianca et al., 2005; Yakura, 2002). Some of the challenges that arise within this orthodoxy include how best to manage

temporalities for individuals and for teams in order to maximise productivity (Maruping et al., 2015; Mohammed and Nadkarni, 2011) and how to manage change effectively over time through time-pacing and sequencing activities (Huy, 2001).

Viewed according to this Newtonian tradition, waiting and delay disrupt the predictable and manageable flow of information and activity and are therefore undesirable, hence favouring such practices as just-in-time management processes that are specifically designed to eliminate wait (Gasparini, 1995), or queue management strategies at the interface between customers or service users and organizations aimed at improving the experience of waiting (Liang, 2017).

However, there is a consensus that this Western view of time fails to take account of alternative time-orientations, or of the individual and collective experience of time (Hassard, 2000; Lord et al., 2015). Moreover, it can paradoxically damage an organization's ability to tackle problems or generate creative responses, as it imposes artificial constraints on the messy realities of organizational life, inhibiting the development of creative solutions (Blount and Janicik, 2001; Reinecke and Ansari, 2015). Also neglected are differences in the value and perception of time across cultures (Chia, 2010).

Second, time can be viewed from a *process or event-based perspective*, where it is regarded as qualitative, non-linear and endogenous to events and processes (Chia, 2002). According to Reinecke and Ansari (2015: 621), process-time features 'unfolding moments and ongoing transformations', or 'kairos' (event-time), whereby individuals' temporal attention is regulated through social and natural events rather than through imposed temporal deadlines. This resonates more closely with Eastern thought, where past, present and future are not seen as isolable, duration expectations are imprecise, and scheduling is fluid (Blount and Janicik, 2001). According to such a temporal viewpoint, waiting and delay are less likely to be

negatively construed and may be seen as an inevitable and potentially positive feature of working life.

A third perspective on time is that it is *socially constructed*, whereby social entities such as occupations, industries or organizations generate their own temporal norms or orders (Leroy et al., 2015; Segre, 2000; Sorokin and Merton, 1937). Thus, some types of work, such as trading stocks and shares, are associated with speed, whereas others, such as traditional craft practices, are associated with the ‘self-artistry of slowness’ (Jalas, 2006: 346). Some jobs are highly time-determined with rigid schedules, whilst others have less rigid time orders and are more free-flowing (Author, 2016). Certain activities, for example creative work, require incubation and ‘thought-time’ (Noonan, 2015: 116), or switching between inactivity and intensive efforts (Van Eerde, 2016), and others, such as factory work, involve repetitive sequences of actions. Some occupations, though, feature a range of different activities, such as teaching, and are therefore subject to ‘kaleidoscopic time’ (Bergmann, 1992: 123). According to Blount and Janicik (2001), organizations also develop their own temporal structures comprising explicit schedules and deadlines, implicit rhythms and cycles of behaviour, and organizational cultural norms concerning time. The implication of the social construction of time for waiting is that certain social orders are likely to generate climates where waiting is viewed more positively, or tolerated better, than others.

Time is also experienced *subjectively* (Keightley, 2013; Shipp et al., 2009; Smollan et al., 2010), as the perceived passing of time varies from one task to another, or from one day to another. Subjective time is therefore central to individual sensemaking (Hernes and Maitlis, 2010), and individuals’ subjective time perception will determine the meaning attributed to specific events (Mosakowski and Earley, 2000). The subjective interpretation of time’s passing can be purposefully controlled by individuals, for example, by taking part in particular activities or social situations in order to create certain types of temporal experience (Flaherty,

2003). Equally, the experience of time passing is influenced by external factors, such as the nature of the environment or social norms (Liang, 2017). Labianca et al.'s (2005) experimental study revealed how altering the start time of a task from prototypical 'clock time' starts e.g., on the hour, to atypical start times, e.g. seven minutes past the hour, led to groups creating more time pressures for themselves and generating poorer quality outputs, despite the same elapsed time being available for the task. The implication of this body of work is that attitudes towards waiting are likely to vary between individuals and between different waiting events.

Studies of waiting in other literatures across the social sciences can be linked with the organizational temporality literature to show that the subjective experience of waiting, especially chronic, long-term waiting, may be associated with feelings of powerlessness and a limited sense of agency (Ferrie and Wiseman, 2016; Liang, 2017). For example, Griffiths (2014) found that the waiting experienced by refused asylum seekers and detainees led to disrupted temporalities and engendered feelings of instability and precarity. Waiting can be conceptualised as an unevenly distributed exercise of power, since it is often the case that the powerless are made to wait for the powerful, the poor for the wealthy (Auyero, 2011; Khosravi, 2014). To wait is to be made aware of one's dependence on another (Schwartz, 1975). However, waiting can also be joyous and full of anticipation, even when the waiting takes place in unpleasant physical conditions, such as is experienced by those waiting in crowds for the glimpse of a passing celebrity, or for the launch of the latest i-Phone (Liang, 2017). Thus, the subjective experience of waiting is likely to vary according to a range of individual and environmental conditions.

Such temporal perspectives should not be regarded as absolute or separable, but rather as interconnected and coexisting (Mainemelis, 2001). In this way, employees experience and enact a complex and often conflicting array of temporalities in daily organizational life. Temporality is furthermore a site of contestation (Fitzpatrick, 2004), as individuals vie for

control over their time, such as the factory workers in Roy's (1959) study whose strategy of 'banana time' aimed to help them regain a sense of satisfaction in their work. Organizational waiting as a temporal experience is therefore unlikely to emerge as unproblematic, linear and quantifiable, but rather as complex, contested and emergent.

The literature on temporality in organizations hints at the potential significance of the waiting experience for employees, but stops short of a theory of waiting. By linking theories of organizational temporality with evidence from the empirical literature on waiting in related domains, we can begin to map the terrain of organizational waiting.

The Elements of Situated Waiting

Waiting takes place during the time when an employee is unable to proceed with one or more aspects of their work-related activity due to the temporary, semi-permanent or permanent unavailability of required information or resources. It may also arise when the individual makes a deliberate choice to pause before taking action or making a decision. This comprises a number of distinct yet inter-related features. At the individual level these are the status of the person waiting, the perceived agency of the person waiting, and individual temporal orientations.

The second set of characteristics is concerned with the wait itself and comprises the temporal characteristics of the wait, the reason for waiting, the nature of the wait, and the criticality of the wait. Finally the social, occupational and organizational context of the wait will be salient for whether the wait is appraised as a positive or a negative experience.

Individual Factors

Status. Waiting has been described as an exercise of power (Khosravi, 2014; Turnbull, 2016). It is generally the case that those of a lower status wait for those of a higher status, and so making people wait can be construed as integral to domination (Bourdieu, 2000). Vladimir and

Estragon are in thrall to the eponymous Godot in Beckett's play. It is the unseen Godot who determines when their wait will end but who, in failing to materialize, condemns them to wait in apparent perpetuity. Access to those in power is often regulated, with the most powerful only being seen by appointment (Schwartz, 1975). Readiness to be kept waiting conversely signals deference, respect and submission (Lahad, 2016; Turnbull, 2016). The interminable and uncertain waits of the powerless in settings such as welfare offices (Auyero, 2011), prisons (Armstrong, 2015) or immigration detention centres (Turnbull, 2016) have been well documented. Such chronic waiting can result from a purposive strategy on the part of the organization, which aims to foster docility and subservience while perpetuating inequalities (Auyero, 2011; Sellaerberg, 2008), and can be generative of feelings of debasement (Schwartz, 1975). In an organizational setting, it is often the case that junior employees will wait to see more senior staff, or choose to arrive early for a meeting, for instance, so as not to cause the other to wait, symbolic of a 'respect pattern' (Hall, 1959). However, the converse is less likely to be true. That said, it may also be the case that those in senior positions will experience lengthy and indeterminate waits in relation to wider business activities. Sull (2005) writes about the 'active waiting' experienced by executives managing in unpredictable markets.

However, the everyday experience of waiting is likely to be more common for those in junior roles than for those in senior roles. Equally, the very act of waiting serves to confer a lower status on those who wait and a higher status on those who cause others to wait, thereby shoring up the status quo. Waiting among individuals can therefore be viewed as stratified (Schwartz, 1975) and indicative of relative status.

Agency. Waiting is often conceptualised as wasted or empty time away from productive activity (Minnegal, 2009). However, individuals may choose to enact their agency during the waiting process either prospectively or retrospectively in order to alleviate negative experiences associated with waiting, or to fill any available time with alternative meaningful

activity (Rotter, 2016). In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon choose to spend their waiting time arguing, talking and playing games, consciously seeking ways to occupy their time. Research provides some examples of how individuals construct alternative meanings; some examples include the partners of seafarers who used strategies of peer support, such as sharing information and stories on social media with others in a similar situation in order to cope with the long-term waiting and temporal disruption associated with their partners' absence (Tang, 2012); the business travellers who used interstitial physical spaces such as waiting rooms and trains for work or other activities (Gustafson, 2012); and the senior executives who used waiting periods to lay the foundations for dealing with opportunities and threats and to focus on routine improvements (Sull, 2005). Gasparini (1995: 35) refers to such times as 'equipped waiting'.

Thus, there is a range of agential options open to individuals beyond the mere passive acceptance of waiting, and individuals' perceptions of the degree of agency open to them during a waiting situation will vary depending on individual dispositions and situational conditions. For example, agency can be linked with locus of control, or the degree to which individuals believe they are able to control their life events and circumstances (Levenson, 1973; Shipp et al., 2009), which indicates that those who choose an agential response to the experience of waiting may have an internal locus of control and thereby proactively seek out productive ways of using their time. We can moreover conjecture that perceived agency during the waiting period may serve to mitigate the negative appraisal of waiting that is likely engendered by low levels of perceived status.

Temporal orientation. Studies have shown that individuals vary in their temporal orientations or 'temporal personality' (Ancona et al., 2001: 519) along a number of dimensions salient for waiting. As Leroy et al. (2015: 761) argue, 'time at the individual level is intricately linked to how people process and make sense of the temporal cues present in their environment'. This

is consistent with the notion of ‘subjective’ time (Mosakowsik and Earley, 2000), whereby time’s passing and attitudes towards time cannot be understood merely from the perspective of ‘clock time’ (Ramo, 2004), but rather need to be apprehended from the perspective of the individual.

First, individuals differ in their degree of *time urgency*; those who are high on time urgency believe that time is scarce and must be conserved, they tend to be preoccupied with the passage of time and feel hurried (Gevers et al., 2015; Landy et al., 1991; Mohammed and Nadkarni, 2011; Waller et al., 2001). This impacts on their perceptions of deadlines and deadline-oriented behaviour, with such individuals often focused on the efficient use of time (Leroy et al., 2015), and so the implication is that these individuals will be less tolerant of waiting.

Individuals also vary in their *pacing style*, or how they distribute their effort over time towards deadlines (Shipp et al., 2009). Three pacing styles have been identified: early action, deadline action and steady action (Gevers et al., 2006), and these are likely to be relevant for understanding how someone would respond to a wait. Those who procrastinate, or favour deadline action, tend to engage in purposive and frequent delays in either starting or completing a task, leading to impaired achievements and distress (Jansen and Kristof-Brown, 2005; Prezepiorka et al., 2016). Such individuals may make less negative appraisals of waiting compared with others.

Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) argue that people also vary in their *temporal focus* or their characteristic orientation towards the past, present or future (Shipp et al., 2009). Those focused primarily on the present tend to be more concerned with immediate hedonic pleasures and take more risks than others. Linked with this is the notion of *time attitude*, or the specific positive or negative attitudes that people have towards past, present and future (Shipp et al., 2009). For instance, worry refers to a fearful preoccupation with future outcomes (Floyd et al., 2005) and

hope describes positive expectations that goals will be met in future (Snyder et al., 1991). *Temporal distance* is another aspect of temporal orientation, and represents the extent to which individuals focus on events near or distant in time (Cojuharenco et al., 2011). Taken together, these suggest that the experience of waiting will likely be appraised as more problematic by those who tend to adopt a fearful focus on the future.

Individuals also have a *synchrony preference* (Leroy et al., 2015), or willingness to adapt their pace and rhythm to those around them in order to create synchrony with others. Although the social entrainment model suggests that individuals will spontaneously synchronise with others, people in fact vary in the extent to which they are willing to do this, which influences how they contribute to task progress within their work group. Leroy et al.'s synchrony preference theory (2015) proposes that those who are low on synchrony preference may experience having to slow down as a temporal goal blockage leading to frustration, blame and anger as they are less flexible and more concerned with autonomy. Such individuals often have a strong need for dominance (Steers and Braunstein, 1976). By extension, those who are high in synchrony preference may be relaxed at the prospect of waiting, as they have a preference for fitting in with the pace of others over maintaining their own temporal schedule (Leroy et al., 2015).

Polychronicity (Shipp et al., 2009) refers to the extent to which individuals prefer to perform tasks simultaneously versus sequentially (Agypt and Rubin, 2011). Leroy et al. (2015) suggest that those who have a preference for multi-tasking may not mind waiting as they are more open to changes in the sequence of their activities.

Wait Characteristics

Each instance of waiting will display its own characteristics. These can be grouped under four broad headings: the temporal features of the wait, the reason for the wait, the nature of the wait, and the criticality of the wait.

Temporal features. A wait will have a number of inter-related actual and perceived temporal features, notably *the length* of the wait, *the degree of indeterminacy* associated with the wait, and *the pacing* of the wait. Short waits, or ‘small-change time’ (Schwartz, 1975: 14) are very common in organizational settings. These would include for example waiting for a few minutes for a colleague to respond to an email, waiting for the chance to speak in a meeting, or waiting for a programme to open on an electronic device. However, it has been argued that long waits, whether actually long or perceived as being long, may be linked with negative emotions such as irritation, anger, impatience or boredom (Auyero, 2011; Schwartz, 1975). Research has shown that perceived waiting time can be influenced by external factors such as temporal information or distractors (Lee, Chen and Hess, 2015; Liang, 2017), with time passing more quickly when the duration is filled rather than empty, or the ‘filled duration illusion’ (Horr and Di Luca, 2015: 1).

Indeterminate waits, notably those with no constraints on the length of the wait, or chronic waits, have been found to be particularly problematic for individuals, as Vladimir and Estragon discovered (Griffiths, 2014). For example, Turnbull’s (2016) study in an immigration detention centre shows how the unpredictability of the length of the wait, which could be hours or years, and where the outcome was potentially life-changing, limited the agency of detainees and led to a perpetual state of being ‘stuck’. In a typical organizational setting, indeterminate or chronic waits are likely to be rare, but may equally lead to negative outcomes. However, it is also likely that an individual’s temporal orientation moderates the association between the perceived length of the wait and the appraisal of the wait. For example, individuals who have high levels of time urgency, who have an early action pacing style or who have a fearful focus on the future are likely to make a more negative appraisal of lengthy or indeterminate waits as compared with others. Those who are high on polychronicity may well have a more positive appraisal of a lengthy or indeterminate wait due to their propensity to multitask and make

alternative use of the time available, thereby filling it with meaningful activity and making it appear shorter (Leroy et al., 2015).

The third factor is the pacing of the wait. Bourdieu's (2000) study of the temporal experiences of teenagers in France in the 1990s shows that waiting can be characterised by alternations between periods of 'dead' time and periods of 'crisis', giving rise to oscillating experiences of boredom and urgency (Jeffrey, 2008). In an organizational setting, Gersick's (1988; 1989) studies of team temporality reveal that group internal time processes are heavily influenced by externally driven deadlines that serve to spark task-related transitions. Such 'external pacers' (Humphrey et al., 2004) are likely to influence the temporal experience of waiting. Person-environment fit theory suggests that the degree of compatibility between the individual's temporal approach to work and the temporal nature of the work setting will influence individual attitudes (Jansen and Kristof-Brown 2005). Thus, in situations where there is a high level of congruence between the pacing style of individuals and that of the wait itself, then more positive appraisals of the wait are likely.

Reason for the wait. Individuals wait for a wide range of different reasons. Drawing in part on Liang (2017), Sellenberg (2008), Gasparini (1995) and Schwartz (1975), the reasons for waiting in organizations can be classified under five headings: anticipatory waiting, inefficiency-based waiting, scarcity-based waiting, time-delay based waiting, and waiting caused deliberately by another party versus individually-chosen waiting. These are not mutually exclusive and some instances of waiting may feature more than one of these.

Anticipatory waiting entails waiting for something that is hoped-for, such as a piece of good news, the delivery of some new equipment, or a colleague's return from annual leave. In such cases, waiting is likely to be experienced eagerly and as full of hope (c.f. Liang, 2017; Tang,

2012). However, Vladimir and Estragon's experiences show how such anticipation may fade over time and turn to cynicism and despair.

Inefficiency-based waiting is waiting that is caused by the malfunctioning of equipment or processes, or human error. Examples of this would include computer or machine breakdowns causing a delay in one's own work, slow bureaucratic approval processes, and colleagues providing the wrong information that causes delays. Inefficiency-based waiting is likely to be associated with negative emotional responses such as frustration (Gasparini, 1995).

Scarcity-based waiting is caused by the lack of availability of required goods or services (Gasparini, 1995). This type of waiting is often associated with queuing, such as the queues that form for the launch of a new product (Liang, 2017). In an organizational setting, scarcity-based waiting might for example be caused when an individual has to schedule an appointment some time in the future in order to meet with a senior colleague who has limited availability, or when they have to wait for a busy maintenance engineer to attend a breakdown.

Time-delay based waiting arises when an employee is obliged to wait for something as a result of natural or inevitable processes. In this case, the waiting is not caused by inefficiency or scarcity, but simply by the length of time that it would take for something to occur. Examples of this would include waiting for a kettle to boil to make a cup of coffee, waiting for the results of an experiment, or waiting for the end of the working day. Such waits are likely to be perceived in a neutral way.

Waiting caused deliberately by another party occurs when someone consciously withholds information, equipment or resources from another. Schwartz (1975) argues that waiting can be used as a means of retaliation, punishment or the exercise of power. In this way, individuals can cause others to wait as an act of sabotage or vengeance, or to reinforce one's own high status, in which case it can be classed as a deviant act. Examples would include waiting for a

colleague to pass on documents that they are deliberately withholding, or waiting for a meeting with someone who knowingly keeps rearranging and cancelling the meeting. Under such conditions, waiting can be associated with low status and self-esteem on the part of the person waiting (Schwartz, 1975). Individuals can also cause others to wait by deliberately stalling in order to generate what is perceived to be a beneficial outcome for themselves. For example, Sellenberg (2008) shows how delays are used in some settings to enable service users to ‘cool out’ and dampen their emotional response to a likely negative outcome.

Conversely, *individually-chosen waiting* arises when the individual themselves chooses to wait before taking an action or making a decision, even if all externally-driven factors are accounted for. This may arise for a number of reasons. For example, the individual may believe that a better outcome can be achieved by pausing and weighing up alternatives before making a commitment. Conversely, the decision to wait may arise from the individual’s temporal orientation, such as their preferred pacing style (Shipp et al., 2009).

In all, the perceived reason for the wait is likely to be associated with how that wait is appraised by the individual. In particular, waits whose cause is perceived to be beyond the control of the individual are likely to be negatively appraised. Leroy et al. (2015) argue that individuals with a strong need for autonomy and who thereby place a high value on their uniqueness, or who have a strong need for dominance, in other words, a need to feel in control of their environment (Steers and Braunstein, 1976), may be less willing to fit in with others and so may be less tolerant of waiting when this is caused by factors exogenous to the individual.

Nature. Waits also differ in terms of their nature, in other words the manner in which the wait is carried out. The nature of waits can be classified first according to whether they are *conducted alone or with others*, and second whether they are ‘*pure*’ waits or waits that occur *while doing other activities* (Tang, 2012).

Sellerberg's (2008) study of waiting in the context of rejected applicants found that waiting may take place alone, in the company of supporters, or in the company of competitors, for instance fellow job applicants. These same criteria may be applied to an organizational setting where individuals can wait alone to hear if they are being given a pay rise, for instance; with others (either virtually or in person) who are waiting for the same outcome, such as a missing piece of information required for a team project; or in competition with others, such as waiting to hear about an internal promotion. Waiting in competition with others is likely to increase an individual's sense of isolation.

Waiting with others can be associated with a sense of companionship and help make the process of waiting more bearable (Tang, 2012), although Vladimir and Estragon's escalating disagreements are indicative that the converse may also be true. The relational perspective of time (Leroy et al., 2015), according to which individuals are sensitive to the socio-temporal cues arising within the work environment, is relevant in this context. When someone is waiting with others, they are more likely to be exposed to feedback from those around them in terms of how the wait is appraised. For those who have a high degree of synchrony preference, any positive evaluation of this type of wait is likely to be amplified.

Waits vary depending on whether the individual is engaged in 'pure waiting', in other words, the individual experiences an unused present and an 'interstitial time', or whether waiting occurs while doing other activities (Tang, 2012), or what might be termed 'busy waiting'. In the former case, waiting may be perceived as 'wasted time', associated with opportunity costs and the lost value of foregone alternatives, symbolized by the regrets expressed by Vladimir and Estragon (Blount and Janicik, 2001). In the latter instance, the wait may be filled with substitute meanings and actions (Gasparini, 1995). Waits whose settings enable the time of person waiting to be filled with pleasant, varied experiences are more likely to be positively perceived (Cunliffe et al., 2004). For example, an individual may be sitting in a room waiting

for a meeting to start. This waiting time could comprise ‘wasted time’ if they are just sitting there doing nothing, or it could comprise ‘busy waiting’ if they use the time to prepare for the meeting or to deal with emails. Whereas the enactment of individual agency during the waiting period denotes the degree of *choice* available to the individual over the use of the waiting time, the notion of ‘busy waiting’ is concerned with the *opportunities* open to the individual to use the time in other ways.

Criticality. The criticality of the wait comprises the *degree of disruption* to work activities caused by the wait. Some waits will be perceived by the individual as causing relatively little disruption, such as waiting for a non-urgent piece of information, whereas others will be perceived as extremely disruptive, such as waiting for a repair to equipment that cannot be used in the meantime.

Context

The final element of situated waiting theory is the overall context within which the waiting occurs (Granqvist and Gustafsson, 2016).

Occupational context. Different occupations have different temporal orders (Bergmann, 1992; Sorokin and Merton, 1937). Types of work that are associated with speed, or those featuring rigid time schedules or temporal cycles are likely to be less tolerant environments for waiting and delay than occupations that are more flexible run according to ‘development time’ (Blount and Janicik, 2001).

Organizational context. Resource availability theory suggests that waiting times are linked to the competitive structure of industries, and that waiting is likely to be longer in monopolistic organizational settings than in competitive ones (Schwartz, 1975). Equally, the concept of entrainment shows how organizations adapt to relevant timings in their environment, such that

industry incumbents shape their activities in terms of either regular or irregular cycles (Pina e Cunha, 2004). Organizations that adopt regular cycles may be less able to cope with delay and waiting than those with irregular cycles. Finally, some organizations will seek to engender a culture of speed in which waiting and delay may be poorly tolerated; in settings such as these, individuals may be more prone to experience high levels of pressure and work intensity with little or no respite. In such organizations, when there is in addition a heavy emphasis on performance management, individuals might experience waiting as highly problematic.

Social context. As time is socially constructed, firms operating in a Western capitalist context where time is regarded as a linear resource to be optimised and where it is regulated and controlled, are more likely to be under pressure to maximise the value accrued from time, and are therefore likely to be less tolerant of delays than organizations operating within a process-based Eastern temporal orientation (Chia, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2004; Segre, 2000).

These contextual features will also of course interact, giving rise to plural or contested contexts for waiting, particularly when the waiting crosses organizational, occupational or social boundaries, such as when waiting for a colleague based in an overseas subsidiary, or when waiting for feedback from a client whose operations are in another industry.

Outcomes of waiting

Thus far, we have referred to the potential outcomes of the wait in terms of whether it is appraised positively or negatively by the individual who is waiting. This is particularly important in the context of the potential negative outcomes of waiting since, as Taylor (1991) argues, negative events evoke a stronger affective reaction than do positive ones. This is pertinent to the case of waiting because, although waiting might sometimes be positive, it is often likely to be a negative experience and therefore may be associated with dissatisfaction or

frustration, depending on the salience and criticality of the waiting event to the individual (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996).

Ultimately, if an individual is obliged to spend considerable portions of the working day waiting, then these waits may moreover compound and interact, giving rise to potentially intense or conflicting emotional and attitudinal responses.

We provide an example below of how multiple instances of waiting may play out during the working day.

Jeff is a cleaner in a high school. He prefers to arrive in good time (individually chosen waiting) so that he does not delay the teaching staff (perceived low status; anticipatory waiting), and so gets to the school 15 minutes early (early action temporal pacing; waiting alone). He spends the time flicking through his social media accounts while he is waiting for the caretaker to unlock the building, although temperatures are sub-zero (unpleasant setting of the wait; ‘busy waiting’). Once started, Jeff waits for the hot water to run through so that he can fill his cleaning cart with warm water (short, time-delay based wait), but the boiler has broken down overnight (inefficiency-based wait) and he has difficulty getting hold of his supervisor on the phone to alert her to the situation so she can call an engineer (potential deliberately-caused wait – the supervisor often turns off her phone so that operatives cannot contact her with problems). The delays mean Jeff is still cleaning when the teaching staff start arriving, and so Jeff alters the ordering of his jobs to accommodate the teachers who wish to gain access to their classrooms straight away (agency; status; high on synchrony preference). This means he ends up working late, and has to wait for lessons to start before he is able to finish cleaning the corridors (compounding waits). Jeff finishes the working day feeling frustrated and annoyed (negative appraisal), and decides he won’t bother to come in early again tomorrow (negative behavioural outcome). However, he is aware that he is likely to

receive a warning from his supervisor for failing to complete his tasks on time, as the company has a very stringent performance management programme in place, causing him to worry about his next meeting with his supervisor (organization intolerant of waits).

Jeff's story shows how a series of varied waiting experiences become compounded over the course of the working day, leading to feelings of frustration and annoyance and the withdrawal of discretionary effort. During some of the waits, Jeff is able to exercise his agency (Tang, 2012), such as filling his waiting time by using social media which may make the wait pass more quickly (Horr and Di Luca, 2015) but, during others, his relative powerlessness over either the cause of the wait or its resolution highlights his lack of status (Auyero, 2011) and conflicts with his personal temporal orientation (Blount and Janicik, 2001), leading to a negative affective and behavioral response. The implications of this are discussed next.

Discussion

The subjective experience of waiting has generally been described as one that is negative, associated with feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness, frustration and disappointment, particularly in the case of lengthy or chronic waits (Auyero, 2011; Schwartz, 1975), although the potential for waiting to be experienced as a hopeful time that is potentially both active and productive has not been discounted (Ferrie and Wiseman, 2016; Rotter, 2016). Waiting can also be regarded as an essential feature of working life, since a working day with no pauses would be experienced as overly intense and draining. Rarely, however, has waiting been deemed a neutral undertaking (Liang, 2017). Waiting is also not a static experience, but one which evolves over time, particularly in the context of a lengthy or chronic wait, where initial motivation can dwindle and fade (Sellerberg, 2008), levels of annoyance and frustration rise (Schwartz, 1975), and the intensity of emotional responses vary.

Time spent waiting is generally ‘down-time’, time during which work tasks cannot be progressed and during which the employee is aware of their dependence on others and on a range of material and physical resources that may not be available to them when they need them. The time that employees spend waiting is time that has hitherto not been theorised or researched in the management literature, and hence can be regarded as a hidden feature of organizational life. By bringing waiting to the fore, the importance of understanding what waiting means, and how it might be experienced by employees, as well as the link between waiting and other conceptions of temporality, such as the distinction between clock and process time (Holmquist, 2013), is revealed.

In this article, waiting is shown to be a complex every-day occurrence and, as such, one that will likely have spill-over effects on employee attitudes and behaviours. The notion of situated waiting proposes how factors at the level of the individual, the wait itself, and the wider waiting context are all relevant to understanding how the individual employee might experience and respond to a range of waiting experiences and responses. A number of specific implications arise from this theory of situated waiting, which can be grouped according to four core themes.

First, issues power and agency are woven into the fabric of the waiting experience (Bourdieu, 2000), and it is likely that employees of lower status will experience more instances of waiting over which they have little or no control than managers or senior managers. The potentially negative effects of such waits may be offset by factors such as the companionship of waiting with or alongside others, or occupational contexts that are flexible or tolerant of delays. However, as Jeff’s experience highlights, the cumulative effects of compounding waits over a period of time may over-ride any mitigating factors and lead to feelings of frustration, powerlessness and alienation. Conversely, individuals may choose to enact their agency while waiting to make alternative or productive use of their time to build meaning and worth (Rotter, 2016).

The second core theme is the significance of the wait. Some waits will be of more salience and importance to the individual than others. In particular, waits that are lengthy or indeterminate, that are especially critical for instance in terms of the impact on the individual's work, or that are caused by inefficiency or the deliberate acts of others will be especially problematic for the individual. In Jeff's case, the broken-down boiler and the difficulty getting hold of his supervisor, which he sees as deliberate avoidance on her part, are the instances of waiting that cause him the most frustration. It is this type of wait that is likely to lead to the strongest negative responses from individual.

Third, the contextual and situational features of the wait combine to create an environment that is highly relevant for understanding how the wait is experienced and the responses available to individuals. Waits that take place in a highly pressured organizational setting where speed is highly prized and frequently measured are much more likely to be negatively appraised. Conversely, in some situations, waiting may not only be tolerated but may even be expected or preferred. For example, individuals working in craft industries may choose to work slowly using traditional tools and techniques with built-in waiting and delays (Jalas, 2006). For Jeff, the knowledge that his employer adopts a tough stance on performance management is an additional source of anxiety and pressure that affects how he experiences delay.

Finally, individuals will bring their own unique personal predispositions and attitudes to bear on waits, with some personality types able to cope with waiting and some more likely to choose to enact their agency in the context of waiting as compared with others. Jeff is high on synchrony preference, for example, which means that he prefers to adapt his timings to those around him, and so he is happy to change his routine to accommodate the arrival of the teachers. Individuals who experience high levels of time urgency or who prefer to work to clear deadlines may however struggle more to cope with waiting.

In sum, as Jeff's story illustrates, the theory of situated waiting proposes that we need to take account not just of individual waits experienced by individuals in the course of their work, but also of multiple, competing and sometimes conflicting waits experienced over the course of a working day. Whereas the literature on waiting in other fields such as hospitals or detention centres focuses on a single aspect of waiting that is highly salient and disruptive to the individual, the notion of situated waiting from the perspective of the employee shifts the emphasis towards a consideration of waiting as a multi-layered ongoing experience, a pervasive feature of organizational life.

Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This article lays out the field of waiting in organizations for the first time, and so inevitably there are some topics that could not be included and that warrant further theoretical and empirical development. For example, the question of how individual-level experiences of waiting are aggregated to the level of the team, and how team-level experiences of waiting might interact with individual-level waiting are issues worthy of investigation, building on Labianca et al.'s (2005) study of other temporal issues at the level of the team, such as scheduling and activity-pacing. For example, studies could explore whether affective responses to waiting are contagious within work groups, or how waits become compounded within teams. Equally, studies could address the question of how different temporal orientations to waiting at the team or occupational level affect collaboration between different work groups.

Empirical research that operationalises elements of situated waiting would help to shed light on the complex and lived experience of waiting from the perspective of the employee. Some areas that would particularly be useful to investigate include the interaction effects between different components, such as how individuals are able to enact their agency in various waiting situations, and the development of nuanced insights into how the antecedent factors are

associated with the range of potential outcomes and experiences of waiting. Research could also examine how the workplace-level ‘social order of waiting’ influences team and individual attitudes towards waiting.

It would also be of interest to explore more critically the role of power in organizational waiting. Although this issue has been given significant attention in other literatures on waiting (Auyero, 2011; Schwartz, 1975), little is known about the effects of power and status on the waiting experience of employees. For instance, what differences are there between the waits experienced by senior and junior colleagues? How do more junior staff respond to being obliged to wait by more senior staff?

To extend these notions further, research that examines the experience of waiting in spill-over situations would add to our knowledge of how waiting plays out for individuals across different contexts. One example of this would be waiting at the home-work interface, and research could explore whether individuals have similar temporal orientations to waiting at work as compared with their personal life, or how waiting at work affects someone’s personal life and vice versa.

Equally, no research has been conducted that explores the tensions that might arise in waiting in boundary situations, such as across organizational boundaries or across cultural settings. Such research would enhance our understanding of the complexities of waiting. For example, research could examine how the social order of waiting in different organizational contexts affects inter-organizational collaborations, or how cultural norms concerning waiting are implicated in cross-border joint ventures.

Qualitative studies could address in more depth the lived experience of waiting from the individual’s perspective, shedding light on how individuals navigate a series of waiting situations and scenarios through the working day. Building on this, research that explores

waiting through a demographic lens considering for example race, gender or age would help to inform our understanding how of individual differences impact on the experience of waiting.

Finally, quantitative research that seeks to establish a measure of the various facets of the experience of waiting would be useful, as it would enable further research exploring the links between the experience of waiting and affective and behavioural outcomes. For instance, research could examine ‘shared waiting’ at the customer service interface, such as times when both the employee and the customer are waiting together for some information from a third party in the organization. Research in this area could explore how shared waiting is experienced by the two parties involved or how the associated power dynamics are played out.

Waiting represents a different nature of time-order from the speed and immediacy which are emphasized in late modernity; as Bissell (2009: 412) argues, ‘stilling, slowing and pausing attune us to the existential dimensions of being that are often subsumed beneath the busyness of everyday life’. However, rather than being in interruption or rupture of the norm, waiting is an inevitable feature of human and organizational life. By bringing waiting to the fore, and considering its textured and nuanced qualities, researchers can reclaim this hidden temporal experience as an important domain of organization studies.

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